May 4th State Employee Protests Across RI: Three RIC Employee Unions Rally on Campus

On May 4, RI Independence Day, public employees across the state protested the governor’s failure to negotiate new contracts in good faith. As events were held at every public employee work site, about 250 RIC employees rallied on the Quad. More than 300 URI employees held a protest at President Carouthers’ campus home and another 150 demonstrated at CCRI. At RIC, it was the first time in history that all three unions held a joint action.

RIC/AFT President Jason L. Blank blasts Gov. Carcieri at RIC Rally and announces June 1st “Rally for Respect” at the State House [Photos by Dan Weisman]
“This is the most difficult negotiation session I’ve ever been involved in,” said Jason Blank, RIC/AFT president. “It’s the longest and most challenging. It is egregious that the governor went public with his demands of deep give backs before we even sat down to begin bargaining. Not only did he wish to force state employees to pay an outrageous share of health insurance, but he also vilified the unions for their resistance to his unilateral demands. He lied when he said that state unions had not proposed premium sharing. He hired approximately 350 administrators at over $100,000 each and then had the audacity to give them exorbitant raises.”

Also speaking at the RIC rally were Rob Bower, president of the PSA @ RIC, Dennis Grilli, interim executive director of Council 94 (AFSCME), Bob Walsh, executive director of NEARI and secretary-treasurer of Working RI, and John Maguire, president of the North Providence AFT and treasurer of the RIFTHP. Bower kicked-off the rally, soon after the RIC Cap and Gown ceremony for graduating seniors had concluded. “The Professional Staff Association, an equal partner in education, stands together with our colleagues on the faculty and support staff. The governor has been unreasonable; the offer by the Board of Governors for salary and health insurance benefits is an insult. We are all working towards the same goal: a decent contract with dignity.”

Maguire, from the RIFTHP, told the RIC rally that the state federation is 100% behind Working RI and higher education. Walsh and Grilli promised that their organizations will continue to pursue reasonable contracts for all state employees and that Working RI will remain a force in the political arena. Blank joined the other speakers in lamenting “1000 days without a raise – and still counting.” Blank’s speech is reprinted later in this Newsletter.

“As positive as this rally was,” commented Blank, “it merely functions as a jumping point for more public actions in pursuit of a decent Contract. We’ll be at the State House on June 1st, among other actions demonstrating our solidarity. It was good to see so many RIC/AFT members out there; we face a hard road and will need to stand together to prevail. And we will.”
June 1st “Rally for Respect”

The “Rally for Respect” will be held Wednesday, June 1, 4:30 PM, in front of the State House, inside if it rains. Everyone is urged to attend, carry bottled water, carpool, and get there early. If it’s inside the State House, participants will have to go through the security check. The RIFTHP will supply t-shirts and other rally paraphernalia.

Text of Jason Blank’s Speech at the Rally

Labor Unionists!!!!!!!

We are gathered here to demonstrate our solidarity with all state workers. “A thousand Days without a raise and still counting”. A salary offer by the Governor of R.I., which he termed generous, when coupled with his proposal for health insurance premium sharing it would result in a one and a quarter to a one and a half percent raise. In fact for some of our sisters and brothers it would result in a salary decrease. Hardly generous!!!!!!

We are tired of false promises—We are tired of lies by this “Education” governor. We are frustrated by his reluctance to recognize and to equitably compensate us for our contributions to the state and to those we serve. We are disgusted with his blatant hypocrisy. He hires high salaried administrators and has the Chutzpah to then give them abominably high raises. He takes from us and gives to his hired guns. This Governor has a major objective---Destroy the Unions. He will not succeed!!!!

Today on May 4th, Rhode Island Independence Day, We declare our freedom,--- we declare our solidarity—we demand equity--- we demand dignity!!!! Let the Union Make Us Strong!!!!

Announcements

The Institute for Labor Studies and Research 25th Annual Awards Evening and Silver Anniversary Celebration will be held on June 2, 6 PM, at the Westin, in Providence. The keynote speaker will be Ed McElroy, President of the national AFT and former president of the RIFTHP and the RI AFL-CIO. Anyone interested in attending is asked to call the RIC/AFT office, 456-9842.

United Health Care cards arrived in the mail and problems immediately arose. MEDCO, the pharmaceutical company affiliated with UHC, unilaterally reduced or refused to fill covered prescriptions of some members. Pharmacies have a helpline which can solve problems like these. If you encounter any difficulties filling prescriptions, first ask your pharmacy to call their dedicated helpline; then you can call 1-866-202-0434. Please let the Union office know of these difficulties, regardless of outcomes. If your card has not arrived, call RIC Human Resources immediately: 456-8216.